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16 June 1986

El Salvador: Human Rights Update

The human rights performance of the Salvadoran armed forces has shown a marked improvement since President Duarte's election in May 1984.

--Over the past two years, some of the most notorious human rights offenders, such as Lt.Col. Marquez, have been removed from senior positions in the uniformed services.

--The reorganization of internal security functions under new deputy defense minister Col. Lopez Nuila--who had tried to reduce rights abuses and corruption in the National Police while its director--has greatly enhanced the government's ability to investigate alleged human rights abuses.

--In combat operations, tougher requirements have been implemented to govern the use of artillery and airstrikes in populated areas in order to prevent civilian casualties. [redacted] civilian casualties have declined.

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--The US Embassy has reported that even the Salvadoran Catholic Church and leftwing human rights groups have conceded that military abuses of civilians and rightwing death squad activities have declined.

The recent flurry of protests against alleged human rights abuses by the Duarte government has been prompted by the detention of nine Salvadoran human rights activists suspected of being members of the FMLN insurgency.

--On 20 May the Treasury Police detained Luz Janeth Alfaro, the Director of Relations of the Salvadoran Nongovernmental Human Rights Commission, who they suspect is a member of one of the FMLN factions.

--The US Embassy reports that Alfaro was well treated by the police during three days of interrogation immediately following her detention and that she has been allowed visits by her family and the International Red Cross. The Embassy says that she offered to cooperate in exchange for agreement by the police to help her relocate to the U.S.

--Based on information provided by Alfaro, the Treasury Police detained eight other insurgents involved in three FMLN-backed human rights groups.

Alfaro admitted she has been a member of the political arm of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) since 1983 and said that the Human Rights Commission and two other Salvadoran human rights groups--the "Co-Madres" ("Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador") and the "Christian Committee for Displaced Persons"--were infiltrated and manipulated by the FMLN.

--In a 30 May press conference, Alfaro also said that most of the information provided by the Human Rights Commission to international and foreign official and private groups is false. For example, many civilians said by her human rights group to have been killed by the Army actually were

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guerrilla combatants, and many of those listed as disappeared were in fact released by the government after questioning.

--Alfaro also admitted that some Salvadoran human rights groups use misleading methods to secure international funding and that 95 percent of all money they obtain really goes to the guerrillas for the purchase of munitions and other supplies.



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